

48th Assembly

December 2003



# NEWSLETTER

## Ridley-Thomas Celebrates Productive First Year In The Legislature

*Signed Legislation and Key Committee Assignments Contribute to Successful Year*

**D**espite the chaos surrounding California politics due in large part to the State's huge budget deficit and the recent recall election, Assemblyman Ridley-Thomas (D – Los Angeles) enjoyed a successful first year in the California Assembly. In a year in which the State's financial troubles overshadowed and severely limited legislative action, Assemblyman Ridley-Thomas was able to send five bills to the governor's desk, all of which were subsequently signed by Governor Gray Davis.

"I am pleased with what I have been able to accomplish this year," said Ridley-Thomas. "Naturally, the magnitude of the State's budget crisis commanded the bulk of the Legislature's attention which in turn, contributed to a small number of measures that made it through the legislative process and were ultimately enacted. Fiscal pressures aside, I was instrumental in passing meaningful reform, not just



*From left to right are Jimma McWilson, Executive Vice President of the San Diego Urban League; John V. Mack, President of CAULE and the Los Angeles Urban League; Assemblyman Mark Ridley-Thomas (standing at the podium) and James Shelby, Treasurer of CAULE and President of the Greater Sacramento Urban League.*

limited to bills that I introduced, but for measures that were considered by the committees of which I am a member."

Consistent with his focus on economic development, community empowerment and social equity, Ridley-Thomas' enacted legislation includes measures that accelerate the removal process for abandoned vehicles, allow the optional collection of racial/ethnic data on voter registration cards, make it easier for students to register to vote, require the disclosure of information used to determine car insurance rates and encourages public utilities to hire California residents.

In addition to authoring

the aforementioned measures, Assemblyman Ridley-Thomas also served as a member of the Assembly Committees on Appropriations, Health and Insurance. The Appropriations Committee is responsible for reviewing all fiscal bills, including bonds and public financing, and as such, reviews all state expenditures. The Health Committee has primary jurisdiction over all bills pertaining to health care, Medi-Cal, mental health, the licensing of health care professionals and long-term health care facilities. In his capacity as a member of the Health Committee, Mr. Ridley-Thomas analyzed and supported Senate Bill 2 (Burton) and Assembly Bill 1528

(Cohn), which combined, will create a statewide employment based health insurance program and a commission to make recommendations on health care improvements and health care cost containment. As a member of the Insurance Committee, the Assemblyman heard and supported legislation to address escalating worker's compensation and will hear additional measures on that issue during the second half of 2003-04 legislative session.

As the budget crisis was the most prominent issue this year, the Assemblyman lent most of his attention during the first half of the session on a series of statewide Budget Town Hall Meetings which provided an overview of the State's budget process, informed participants how to become active participants in the process and presented opportunities for public comment. The hearings, which were held in Fresno, Los Angeles, Oakland and San Diego, informed the public of the severity of the budget crisis, the causes of the fiscal shortage and a range of options available to lawmakers to remedy the shortfall. A full report on the town hall meetings is available online at <http://democrats.assembly.ca.gov/members/a48/>.

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## First Year continued



*Audience members listen to testimony at the Budget Town Hall Meeting held in Los Angeles on January 11, 2003.*

In his capacity as the Chair of the Assembly Committee on Jobs, Economic Development and the Economy, Mr. Ridley-Thomas was instrumental in the advancement of legislation pertaining to all aspects of state and local economic development. Under Mr. Ridley-Thomas' direction, the committee held an unprecedented number of fact gathering hearings on a wide range of economic development issues to help policy makers identify legislative remedies for some of the State's economic challenges. Three separate hearings presented legislators with valuable information on the impact that immigrant labor, eco-friendly business and tax expenditures have on California's economy. The committee will host another informational hearing that will focus on the plight of small businesses in January.

"Despite the challenges presented by the budget crisis and political turmoil that led to the recall, I am confident that the Legislature passed laws that improved the quality of life for Californians. Recognizing that there is still much work to be done in resolving the State's fiscal problems, I look forward to another year of working with my constituents, colleagues and the new administration to identify ways in which government can be improved to serve the needs of the people."

The Assemblyman's priority legislation for the upcoming legislative session include measures that will prohibit credit scoring for insurance policies, impose a fee on the sale of bullets to offset medical costs incurred as a result of gunshot wounds, review of the State's tax expenditure programs and their impact on the budget process and small business relief. A complete list of Mr. Ridley-Thomas' legislative package will be available on the Internet early next year.

## Signed Measures

Listed below are the measures Assemblyman Ridley-Thomas had signed by Governor Davis. All measures will be effective January 1, 2004.



### **AB 478: REMOVING ABANDONED VEHICLES**

Increases the "low-value" threshold from \$300 to \$500 to allow for the disposal of additional unwanted vehicles and reflect inflationary increases since the original adoption of the relevant Vehicle Code section. Also increases the exemption threshold, to avoid noticing the vehicle for 72 hours, from \$100 to \$300 to allow for the efficient removal of more abandoned vehicles.

### **AB 587: PROTECTING VOTING RIGHTS**

Requires California voter registration forms to contain a field for the voluntary collection of racial and/or ethnic data.

### **AB 593: EMPOWERING NEW VOTERS**

Requires the dissemination of voter registration forms and information to students in high schools, community colleges and campuses of the California State University and University of California. Also eliminates the requirement that permanent absentee voters who fail to vote in primary elections be removed from permanent absent voter rolls and directs the Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV) to forward change of address cards and digitized signatures of individuals who register to vote at DMV to the Secretary of State.

### **AB 1181: STOPPING THE INSURANCE RIP OFF**

Requires automobile insurers to the following information to policyholders upon the issuance of a new policy and on each subsequent renewal notification:

- Estimated annual mileage driven
- Years of driving experience
- Vehicle Use (e.g. pleasure, commute, business, etc.)
- Zip code where vehicle is garaged
- Driver-related discounts
- Vehicle-related discounts additionally requires that traffic convictions and at-fault accidents be disclosed or made available to the policyholder upon request.

### **AB 1389: PROTECTING CALIFORNIA JOBS AND CONTRACTS**

Requires the Public Utilities Commission to report to the Legislature the number of customers in California and a calculation showing the percentage of the public utility's domestic customer base that resides in California, the number of employees and independent contractors who are California residents and a calculation showing the percentage of the public utility's domestic workforce that resides in California and the amount of capital investment made in California during the preceding 12-month period.

## Committees Served

### Standing Committees

- Appropriations
- Arts, Entertainment, Sports, Tourism and Internet Media
- Health
- Insurance
- Jobs, Economic Development and the Economy (Chair)
- Utilities and Commerce

### Select Committees

- Asian Trade
- Biotechnology
- Bridging the Technology Gap
- California's Foreign Trade Offices
- Environmental Justice
- Exposition Park, Chair
- Hate Crimes
- King/Drew Medical Center
- Professional Sports, Chair
- Urban Child
- Workforce Investment